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CHARACTER OF METHODISM:

I N W H I C H

The leading Principles of that Sect: the Aids it has borrowed from the Writings of the Clergy, and the Influence it has communicated to them, are considered and stated.

By the Author of Remarks on Dr. HALLIFAX's Preface to the Sermons of the late Dr. OGDEN.

Tros, Rutulufvè fuat, nullo discrimine habebō.

VIRG.

From the grossness of its superstitions we may infer the ignorance of an age, but never should pronounce concerning THE FOLLY OF AN INDIVIDUAL from his admitting popular Errors, consecrated with the appearance of religion.

HUME.

C A M B R I D G E,

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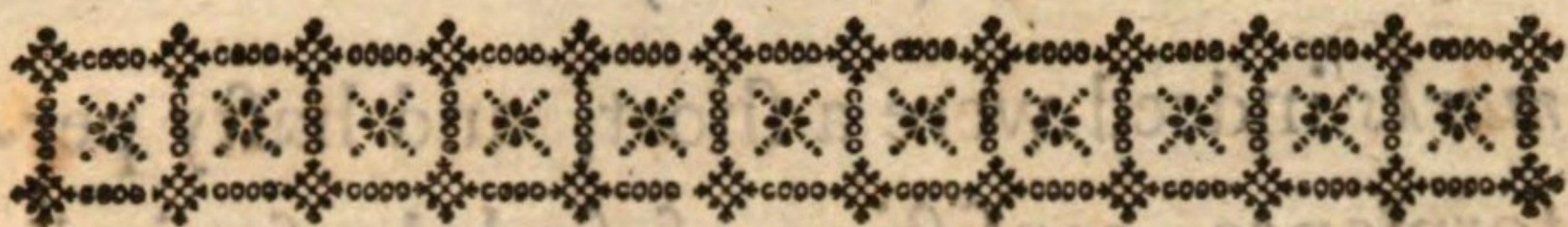
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CHARACTER OF METHODISM.

IF the Question between Dr. HALLIFAX and Mr. MAINWARING had turned upon a mere point of Criticism, the world would never have been troubled either with this, or my former publication; which, although it has a cast of earnestness, was not dictated by an attachment to the Person, or Opinions of any individual. The Re-

marks indeed were a short, and hasty performance, consisting of such loose, indigested reflexions, as immediately occurred on reading the Preface by Dr. H. If ever noticed at all, they probably, by this time, may be quite forgotten. And though I dare not flatter myself, that a wider view, and fuller discussion of the same subject is likely to furnish the Reader with entertainment, or amusement; yet information at least I will hope to afford him—information too, respecting particulars, in which every man, who feels, hath his share of interest, and all, who think, must have some curiosity. On this ground it is, and on no other, that I intreat his attention to the following Considerations on the Nature of ENTHUSIASM: the Origin of SECTS: the peculiar Genius of METHODISM: the Aids
it

it has borrowed from the Writings of the Clergy at large: and the Influence, in return, it has communicated to them.

PERSONS of a lively imagination, and strong sensibility, have been so much affected on surveying the evils of civilized life, that, unmindful of its many advantages and blessings, they have almost envied that class of men, whose lot hath fallen amidst unfrequented mountains, or wild and lonely forests. In opulent states and flourishing communities the greatest corruptions must ever be expected. Yet such a picture of human life in its highest cultivation may well shock a serious and attentive observer. He regrets the loss of that simplicity, which distinguished the earlier ages, when arts were few, and innocence was secure, and virtue in esteem. But an honest and

brave man will not content himself with barely lamenting the depraved morals of his own community. He sees the necessity of some reformation, and, under this conviction, he forms some plan for effecting it. In order to arrest the course of those irregularities, which menace with equal ruin both nations and individuals, he tries the united force of advice, authority, and example. He resolves to frame his own life by a severer rule, than the temper of men in general, or the condition of social intercourse can perhaps admit of: and attributes to the rule divinely prescribed a rigour, in some instances, greater than really belongs to it. All this is quite natural, and the conduct of such a person, though not the most prudent, is more to be admired than censured when we know his integrity. But honesty is so far from being a security

rity against *Enthusiasm*, that it frequently leads men into it: and the mind begins to be enthusiastic, the moment *error* or excess mixes itself with the warmer affections of the religious kind; whether that error respect the great object of all religion; or the nature, extent, and application of particular duties. The *purity* of this passion is a distinct consideration; and can only be estimated by finding out, what seldom can be known exactly, how far singularity, or the love of novelty: in what degree interest, pride, or vain-glory are, or are not, concerned.

THE obscurest part in the history of the Christian Church is the account of those numerous SECTS, which sprung up in the earlier periods of its existence; in the ages of its greatest purity, and most adverse fortune, as well as in those of its

greatest prosperity and corruption. The causes of that obscurity are partly the want of materials in times so remote; and partly the inexplicable inconsistency and extravagance of the notions maintained. But after the revival of Letters, and the grand separation from the Romish Communion, the various opinions which divided its opponents furnished ample matter for learned disputation. And from a view of those contests it is sufficiently clear, that all the parties engaged were tinged more or less with the same spirit of bigotry, and enthusiasm.

HAVING premised thus much concerning SECTS in general, let us now take a short review of that among our own, which is more immediately the subject of our present inquiry.

THIS

THIS *Seet*, like most others, sets up a claim to superior sanctity, and professes, as its title imports, a more than ordinary severity of life and manners.

Pure METHODISM, as it subsisted under its founder, WHITFIELD, and some of his immediate followers, as far as such a Scheme is capable of description, seems to place Religion wholly, or chiefly, in certain inexplicable impulses, or movements of the mind; and requires of its votaries to commit themselves to the guidance of the Spirit, with an utter contempt of reason, and all human learning.

To *argue* with such persons would be fruitless labor. To attack them in the way of wit and ridicule, as some have done with great advantage is, I think, improper. For, amidst all their extravagance,

vagance, some of them, at least may be very sincere. And that veneration, which is due to religion is never more endangered, than when religious errors are exposed in a ludicrous way. Persons of a thoughtful and delicate turn are shocked at such levity. Those of a contrary cast are confirmed in their indifference and insensibility; while the deluded Objects of such raillery are irritated, instead of being reclaimed. Besides, to attack errors of a certain sort, is to give them consequence. Better leave it to time and chance, and the egregious folly of their own supporters, to consign them to oblivion.

BUT there is another sort of METHODISM, which is better entitled to our attention; and I think it may not improperly be called the *mixed*, and *temperate*.

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Each, without doubt, is hurtful in its way ; but by far the greatest danger is to be apprehended from the latter ; which, amidst all its absurdities, carries with it some semblance of reason, and some shew of science * : which doth not directly
and

* In questions, which are purely metaphysical, it is impossible to avoid the use of metaphysical terms, or even the subtilties of abstruse reasoning. But in all sciences there is a way of using terms, which tends only to embarrass a question ; as also there are methods of arguing, which, though specious and imposing, are found, on a strict examination, either perplexed and unintelligible, or false and inconclusive.

When the Reverend Mr. JONATHAN EDWARDS, President of the College of NEW JERSEY, asserts a *moral necessity* in actions, consistent with free-will, he brings together ideas, which, if not directly repugnant, are wholly dissimilar and unrelated ; just as I should do, if, at a vast expence of learned labour, I endeavoured to prove and explain the *natural morality* of actions.

It is proper, however, to lay before the Reader his own Explanation of his own hypothesis.

“ *Moral necessity* is owing to the Power and Government of the inclination of the heart, either habitual, or occasional, excited by Motive.” Letter to a Minister of the Church of Scotland, p. 11.

It is to be hoped that this Minister was one of the double-fighted, as the meaning lies rather too deep for common Observers,

Again,

and constantly bid defiance to nature and common sense, but often, in its pious paroxysms, loses sight of both.

It is difficult to attempt definitions in subjects, where fancy has so large a sway;

Again, when this very philosophizing Divine asserts the *moral necessity* of God's *volitions*, or the necessary determinations of the divine will, in order to defend and establish the Calvinistic Doctrines concerning *Absolute Decrees*, an *universal, decisive Providence*, and the rest of that stamp; he dogmatizes with great airs of assurance in matters, where if we venture to speculate at all, it should be with great modesty. For we never can comprehend how events of a certain class are connected with their causes; and are unable to reconcile the divine prescience with our own freedom, though we are clearly convinced of both. Nor will the new, and nonsensical distinctions of God's *preceptive* will, and of his *disposing* will, in the least assist us, or alleviate the absurdities which follow from the Doctrine of *Absolute, eternal, personal Election*.

He insults Dr. WHITBY, through four or five pages, for asserting, that the freedom of human actions is essential to virtue, and, at the same time, allowing that moral excellence in God is necessary, yet virtuous and praise-worthy. This quick-sighted Metaphysician, who is so fond of inventing or adopting mere verbal distinctions, which have no foundation, cannot discern a difference between an infinite Nature, and his own; but argues and concludes from the one to the other, as freely and peremptorily, as if the analogy between them was perfect throughout, and as if he understood both with equal clearness.

yet,

yet, in order to put the unwary on their guard, I will endeavour to give some account of it. I should call it then, “ A species of Enthusiasm, which draws the attention so strongly to some *particular* doctrines and duties of *Revealed* religion, and fixes it upon them so intently, as almost to exclude the other parts of religion, and even morality itself.” Out of such truths and doctrines, the fanatic of this sort commonly selects the most *difficult* that can be found. His favourite and constant topics are *Grace* and *Assurance*, *Predestination* and *Original Sin*. On *these* he will harangue the unlettered multitude; but instead of explaining the terms in any rational, or consistent manner, he boldly assumes a set of principles of his own; and draws from them such conclusions as are best suited to his wild hypothesis. At first sight, one would not
 imagine

imagine that such persons were at all likely to be possessed with the love of system. It is certain however, that they pretend to solve almost every difficulty that occurs in the conduct of Providence, by the help of those principles, or leading truths of the Gospel, as they chuse to call them. The ground-work of the whole seems to be as follows,

“ God being supremely perfect, and infinitely *greater* than the Universe (i. e. more important) a regard to his own glory, or a display of his perfections must be the sole end of his Administration. If man should never sin, his justice in punishing him could never be displayed. For this reason he predestined the fall of ADAM; and lest opportunities for the full display of his vindictive justice should be wanting, he introduces all the posterity

rity of ADAM into the world with wills bent upon sinning, and averse from goodness.

On the other hand, with a view to display his *mercy*, an infinite Atonement was provided for all indeed in *one* sense, but this, in the event and issue, was made for very few—the favoured and fortunate Objects of his free Election and saving Grace! who are to admire and applaud his justice in damning to all eternity by far the greater ^{part} of their devoted race. If any Objection is made to this scheme, the Answer is, God is omnipotent, and not restrained, or accountable in any sense whatever: he may therefore dispose of his creatures according to his own absolute decrees, without any regard to their behaviour, to the reasons of things, or the rectitude of his own nature. But,
if

if any reason of his severity be required, we are told, that man, in consequence of his inbred corruption, and inherent turpitude, is born under the wrath* of God, and is at enmity with him in the strictest and properest sense of those words: we are told, that the Sin of our first Parents being a direct offence against the majesty of an *infinite*, all-perfect Being, and punishable not only in themselves, but in all their descendants; that part of these, whom he hath not predestined to salvation, must of course be banished from his presence, and consigned to endless and *infinite* misery" (although *more* than this his justice could not decree, nor his power inflict, for the punishment of *actual*, *wilful*, *incorrigible* sinners!)

* See the learned Dr. Whitby's long Note on "Children of Wrath" to the 3rd v. of the 2nd Chap. of the Ep. to the Ephesians.

SUCH, I think, are the main branches of this system (grafted on the old stock of heretical error) which, absurd and shocking as it is, yet when artfully modernized, and moulded by the hands of an able Master, has a plausible appearance: and as it pretends a particular conformity with Scripture, and favours the superstition of the greater part, I do not much wonder that it has many adherents. I believe these leading principles of it are truly stated; for to trace it through all its parts, is not my design. I would only observe, that they proceed from the same source, and terminate in the same folly, as the errors of most other Sects, whether ancient or modern. They would all be “wise above that which is written,” and account for every obscurity in the measures of divine government;—unveiled but in part to us,

and never perhaps to be understood but in part, by the highest Order of celestial Beings.

If from the *Opinions* and *Tenets* of the System, we proceed to the *Temper* and *Genius* of its Professors, we shall soon discover them in the Sentiments, or Matter, as well as in the Stile, or Expression; an ill-placed, uncharitable severity and censoriousness in the former, chiefly directed against the regular Clergy: and in the latter, that coarse and slovenly manner, which is generally chosen for want of a better, though sometimes affected under the specious pretence of a Scriptural simplicity. But in nothing is the Character we are here considering so strongly seen, as in the frequent custom, and absurd manner, of *Quoting the Scriptures*, which either converts into Nonsense

sense the passages cited; or perverts the sense of them, just as the present fancy, or purpose may require. And here I would beg leave to intimate, that so long as any Preacher, or Writer, is guilty of this fault, whatever may be his rank in the Church, or Republic of letters, he may justly be suspected either of leaning to this Character, or of assuming it for some private purpose.

I said, *suspected*—for the truth is, this practice is also owing to causes of *another* kind. Ever since POPERY has been *reasoned*, as well as laughed, out of countenance in all Protestant countries, the growth of Deism, and the decay of Piety have justly been complained of here; and are now more alarming than ever; notwithstanding it is the glory of our Age and Country to have produced the best

Comments on the Scriptures, and the ablest Defences of Religion that ever were written : notwithstanding too, the AUGUST PERSONS, whose Examples* should naturally have that Influence, which neither Laws, nor Authority can have, over the *hearts* of men, are so singularly eminent for their amiable qualities ; such acknowledged Patterns of virtuous conduct.

BESIDES the *sly Sceptical*, and the *malignant free-thinking Genius*, whose intentions are manifestly hostile to religion, there hath crept into these kingdoms a *cold Philosophic Spirit*, which, by overrating the endowments of the human mind, and insisting too strongly on the

* It is not at all surprising, that some Persons, whose feelings are naturally cold, should, when placed in a certain situation, affect *the fervors of piety* ; or that others, who are strangers to the power and efficacy of religion, should assume the appearance of it.

right

right propensities of our common nature, hath almost superseded alike the virtues of Faith, and the blessings of Grace. It has even taught men,—dependant, degenerate, sinful men, to consider the love of God, and gratitude to the Redeemer,—the most natural, and the most reasonable of all our affections, as a species of Enthusiasm *. Such notions were the more formidable, because they sprang up among studious and contemplative persons, who were not suspected of any ill designs, nor actuated, perhaps, by any wrong motives. It is easy to perceive that such an accident must have been extremely favourable to the growth of METHODISM, whose main purpose is, to reprobate Reason and Philosophy ; to awaken and inflame the

* So little indeed is the connexion which this passion has with the love of God, that it really proceeds from the love of Ourselves. Hence the groundless persuasion, so prevalent with all Enthusiasts, that *they* are the peculiar friends and favourites of Heaven.

devout affections ; and rouse men to a sense of piety by incessant appeals to their hopes and fears. There is indeed in every stage of society, and in every period of life, abundant cause to awaken that sense. But it is not considered by zealots, that, in order to *maintain*, and *preserve* it, religion must be placed on its proper basis ; the proofs of it must be submitted to reason ; and the obligations to it enforced by suitable arguments. And although it be necessary to appeal to the passions in their turn, yet a settled piety can only be the result of an informed understanding.

THERE are some Passages in FENE-LON's Dialogues on the Eloquence of the Pulpit, which have so near a relation to the present subject, that I think it not amiss to transcribe them.

“ A

“ A Preacher ought to affect people by strong images, but it is from the Scriptures he should learn to make powerful impressions. There he may clearly discover the way to render Sermons plain and popular, without losing the force and dignity they ought always to possess.

If the Clergy applied themselves to this mode of teaching, we should have two different sorts of Preachers: They, who are ^{not} endowed with a great share of vivacity, would explain the Scriptures clearly, without imitating its lively and animated manner; and if they expounded the word of God judiciously, and supported their doctrine by an exemplary life; they would be very good Preachers. They would employ what ST. AMBROSE requires, a chaste, simple, clear style, full of weight and gravity, without affecting elegance,

Fene lon

or despising the smoothness and graces of language. The other sort, being of a poetical turn of mind, would explain the holy Book *in its own style and figures*: and by that means become accomplished Preachers. The former would instruct their hearers with solidity and perspicuity; the latter would add to their instruction the sublimity, the vehemence, and divine enthusiasm of the Scriptures, which would be (if I may so say) entire and living in them, as much as it can be in men, who are not miraculously inspired from above."

ONE would not imagine that Observations so poor in themselves, and so ill expressed, should have come from the Pen of so great a Man. Besides the looseness, and tautology, the confusion and inaccuracy, that run through them, either

either he is strangely mistaken in *one* point, or he has expressed himself very incautiously. To explain Scripture by the very things, which want explaining—its own style and figures, is a most preposterous method. Preachers too of the poetical cast he mentions, if they indulge it, as they generally do, in unfolding the Doctrines of our religion, give us, in the room of these, their own fantastic notions. For persons of this turn of mind very seldom have a logical head: and if they were *capable* of judging better, would hardly submit to be restrained by those severe laws of criticism, and sound rules of interpretation, which the good sense of these later ages has laid down as inviolable. I believe indeed that such lively and poetical Expositors as the good Prelate mentions, might easily become *accomplished Mystics*; multiply symbols and

shadows with great dexterity of invention; and extract allegorical, or prophetic meanings, from almost every passage or sentence of the inspired Writers.

INDEED, our *modern Mystics* seem to consider the very words and phrases of Scripture as inspired and dictated by the Holy Spirit. Hence, the absurd, superstitious manner of *Quoting*, and *Applying* them so common with those Teachers, whose piety seems to draw all its strength and nourishment from *Sounds*; and whose zeal, though well meant, is too often busied in disparaging the Obligations of Natural religion. For a proof of this we may appeal to the Sermons and other Publications of their celebrated Preachers. I speak of the generality; and although perhaps there may be some exceptions; yet I think that even the soberer and
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sedater part are by no means exempt from this fault. For as to those, who, without any pretensions, but such as cannot be allowed since the time that inspiration ceased, assume to themselves the office of Apostles; and traverse the kingdom to rescue distressed and neglected *Souls* from the hands of their own proper Guides, and appointed Instructors, — I do not concern myself with such persons. If *they* are beneath the notice of laws, as well as beyond the reach of arguments; and if fifty years' experience cannot open the eyes of the *People*; I know of no remedy: the evil must e'en take its course.

It is true, the main spring or source of such fanatical excesses is in the mind and heart of man, which lie open to every species of error and extravagance, if they
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are not prepared and guarded by a right education.

BUT there is *another* cause, latent indeed, or little attended to, which hath had a powerful influence, and principal share, if not in producing this Evil, yet at least in extending the effects of it. So slippery is the ground I am now upon, that, even with TRUTH to uphold and support me, I feel as *he* did, who walked upon the waves. Tender in touching the laurels of such Heroes, and restrained by a reverence which borders on superstition, I *dare* not begin my Inquiries, where I *ought* to begin them,—with our BARROWS, our TILLOTSONS, and our ATTERBURYS: For, most certain it is, that many even of *their* Compositions are exceedingly blemished by
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the *frequency* and *looseness* of Scripture-Quotations; while this practice, authorized by them, and by other regular Divines of the first character, hath afforded a handle for those *wild Applications of Scripture*, on which the whole system of METHODISM is built and established. Before the Reformation our Divinity was wholly made up of the old Logic and Metaphysics of the Schools, employed in explaining the opinions or interpretations of the Fathers, and reconciling these with the strange, and sometimes contradictory decisions of Popes, and Councils. Since that æra, learned Nonsense has lost great part of the reverence it was held in, and Authority, though still revered by men of sense, is no longer opposed to Conviction. The FATHERS in general are now consulted, rather as witnesses of facts, than interpreters of doctrines; and those

those great Men, who led the way in collecting the meaning of Scripture from the Scriptures themselves, bestowed such incessant pains on these Writings, and arrived at such an intimacy with them, that the *Spirit of Quoting* them, though rather immoderate, was perfectly natural.

AND as our eminent Divines of an earlier period had thus paved the way for the *introduction* of METHODISM, so those of a later date present us with proofs of its *Influence*, and the *progress* it has made.

THE Reader will perhaps be startled, when the incomparable SECKER is produced as an instance of this. But whoever shall examine with attention and impartiality the substance of his arguments in favour of *Original Sin*, and the sense of the Passages he has brought from
Scripture

Scripture to confirm those arguments, as stated in his twenty-ninth Lecture on the Church-Catechism, will be able to judge how far the charge is supported by proof. As the Authority of such Persons is the more apt to mislead us in some instances, the more their learning is capable of guiding us in the main, it is proper to evince the truth of what is here advanced by descending to particulars. Among the sixteen different senses, which have been offered or obtruded by the Writers,

(~~omnibus unus~~
Error, sed variis illudit partibus—)

who defend that controverted Doctrine, his prudence directed him to the mildest and most moderate. And yet, to support even this, he is driven to manifest inconsistency in his reasonings, and to applications of Scripture improper and erroneous.

neous. His usual judgment and accuracy in *this* particular seems to have deserted him ;—or rather perhaps *he* has deserted.—but I forbear. It has been shewn by Bishop TAYLOR, the learned Dr. TAYLOR of Norwich, and others, that the notion of our Nature being corrupted or defiled in consequence of ADAM's Sin, is not to be found in the Scriptures, when fairly interpreted ; and that in the first and purest ages of the Church there was no interpretation of them, which supposed men chargeable with the guilt of any sins, excepting their own. But when the blind and presumptuous Philosophy of the Schools was permitted to fabricate Creeds ; and when Power was employed to support and enforce them ; whatever be the fact with respect to our Nature, the Scriptures at least were very soon corrupted. And after this opinion had once
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got possession, other causes conspired to infix and establish it in the minds of men. Its supposed connexion, and pretended affinity with the Scheme of Redemption, and Doctrine of Grace, have procured it such respect and reverence, that, to this day, he, who should venture to express a doubt concerning the truth of it, would, at least by its advocates, be reputed a person of very loose principles, if not a Deist in his heart.—Is it then at all just, or reasonable to expect, that a Person at the head of the Church should disturb the peace of it, and subject himself to censure and obloquy, by opposing a harmless and inveterate error?—Inveterate we grant it is: how very far from harmless, and how little necessary to the peace of the Church, will soon appear. But, in the mean time, is there no medium between

openly

openly opposing a popular Opinion, and directly espousing, or defending it?

IN the course of his admirable Lectures, the Archbishop having explained the several duties of men in their different states, and the obligations they are under to perform them, naturally goes on to inquire, what *ability* they have for this purpose. To shew how defective they are, and how greatly they stand in need of divine assistance, he reasons in the following manner:

“ INDEED, had we ever so great abilities, we must have them, not of ourselves, but of our Maker, from whom all the powers of all creatures are derived. But something farther than this is plainly meant here: that there are no powers belong-

belonging to human Nature in its present state, sufficient for so great a purpose" [that of serving God in an acceptable manner.] "The love of God is spiritual: but we are carnal; fold under sin."

And that such is our condition will appear, by reflecting, first, what it was at our birth; secondly, what we have made it since.

As to the first, we all give proofs, greater or less, of an inbred disorder, and wrongness in our Understandings, Will, and Affections. Possibly, one proof that some may give of it, may be a backwardness to own it. But they little consider, how severe a sentence they would pass, by denying it, on themselves, and all mankind. Even with our natural bad inclinations for some Excuse, we are blameable enough for the ill things that

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we do. But how much more should we be so, if we did them all without the solicitation of any inward depravity to plead afterwards in our favour? In point of interest therefore, as well as truth, we are concerned to admit an Original Proneness to Evil in our frame: while yet reason plainly teaches, at the same time, that whatever God created, was originally, in its kind, perfect and good.

Hecker

To reconcile these two things would have been a great difficulty, had not Revelation pointed out the way, by informing us, that Man was indeed *made upright*, but that the very first of human race lost their innocence, and their happiness together; and tainting, by wilful transgression, their own nature, tainted by consequence that of their whole posterity. “ Thus, by one man, Sin entered
into

into the world, and Death by Sin, and so Death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." We find, in fact, however difficult it may be to account for it in speculation, that the disposition of Parents, both in body and mind, very commonly descend, in some degree, to their Children. And therefore it is extremely credible, that so great a change in the minds of our first Parents from absolute rightness of temper to presumptuous wickedness, accompanied with an equal change of body, from an immortal condition to a mortal one, produced perhaps in part by the physical effects of the forbidden tree; that these things, I say, should derive their fatal influence to every succeeding generation. For though God will never impute any thing to us, as our *personal fault*, which is not of our own doing; yet he may very justly with-

Section
 hold from us those privileges, which he granted to our first Parents, only on condition of their faultless obedience; and leave us subject to those inconveniences, which followed of course from their disobedience: as in multitudes of other cases we see Children in far worse circumstances by the faults of their distant forefathers, than they otherwise would have been. And most evidently, it is no more a hardship upon us *to become such as we are*, by means of ADAM's transgression, than to suffer what we often do for the transgression of our other Ancestors; or to have been *created such as we are*, without any one's transgression; which last, all who disbelieve Original Sin, must affirm to be our case."

I have cited these Observations at their full length, and without interruption, that

that the meaning of them, when it *can* be discerned, may be seen with the greater certainty. For indeed the state of the Question is so often changed, and the condition of our Nature so variously represented, that it is extremely difficult to affix any precise or determinate sense to the several descriptions that are given concerning it. Sometimes the account is such, that any one, not sworn to a System, would readily assent to it. What we derive from ADAM, is the loss or forfeiture of those preternatural privileges, which God, out of free grace and bounty, had reserved for him and his descendants, had he not transgressed; and those positive evils, which were the natural consequences of his transgression (and to *him* a punishment, properly so called), viz. Mortality, Pain, Sicknefs, Sorrow, and the rest of that tragical train, which we,

by our own transgressions, have rendered more afflicting still. At other times, it is besides all this, an inherent, unavoidable depravity of mind and will; a presumptuous, inbred wickedness, which renders us sinful and guilty in the eye of God, before it is possible for us to have any idea of sin or guilt. That all this is included in the sense, which the Archbishop intended to espouse upon the whole, is evident from the following expressions—of our first Parents having *tainted* by wilful transgression their own Nature, and by consequence, that of their whole posterity—of *their* depravity descending to us, by natural inheritance, as a *moral* stain, exactly in the same way, as the mere effects of bodily temperament (which undoubtedly influences the mind in many respects), or of a fortune, impaired or ruined by ill conduct, are

are derived from Parents on their guiltless Offspring. As if this were not inconsistent enough, almost in the same breath it is asserted, that our Original weakness is not our fault, and that God will never impute any thing to us as our *personal* fault, which is not our doing. What is meant by *personal fault*, I cannot conceive, unless this epithet be thrown in for the sake of saving the Notion, which here, for a moment, seems to be given up; but then the sense must be,—a very strange one indeed!—that the fault of *Another* may be imputed to us, though we could not prevent it. Again it is said, that, with all this inbred disorder, and inherent depravity, resident in the very frame and texture of our minds, we feel within us an Obligation of Conscience to do every thing that is right and good.

Would not any one conceive from this representation, that the great Creator, instead of making Man in his own image, had resolved to preserve an image of the Chaos in the human mind? For what else do we see, but jarring principles, and conflicting elements—Non bene junctarum discordia semina rerum! Yet this Nature, it seems, depraved and defiled as it is, has *one* great advantage to recommend it. “ They little consider, how severe a sentence they would pass, by denying it, on themselves, and all mankind. Even with our natural bad inclinations for some Excuse, we are blameable enough for the ill things that we do. But how much more should we be so, if we did them all without the solicitation of any inward depravity to plead afterwards in our favour? In point of interest therefore, as well as truth, we are

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concerned to admit an Original proneness to Evil in our frame." Not in the least: because the mere imbecillity of our Nature, and a bad Education, neither of which may be owing to Ourselves, any more than ADAM's having sinned, will, for those, who look for Excuses, do just as well. Indeed, if the *other* could be pleaded with any colour of reason, the most wicked man living would never want an apology,—I might have said, a justification. But what an entrance to superstition also is here opened! No one can pretend to form the least conjecture concerning the measure* of the supposed pollution, or the manner* of its conveyance;

* If it be said, that we may just as well deny the existence of *Grace*, since we know neither in what measure, nor in what manner *this* power is conveyed, and exerted; I answer, that although we cannot understand how, or in what degree the mind of man is influenced by the Deity: yet we know from experience, that it *may* be influenced in various ways without

veyance ; so that if we will needs account for either, recourse must be had to the old occult qualities, or magical influences, and not to any sound philosophical principles, which never can explain them. Even without the assistance of such commodious Doctrines, men are but too apt, when they violate the laws of religion and conscience, to extenuate their wickedness by throwing the blame upon Nature : they easily reason themselves into the persuasion, that vice is constitutional, and the natural force of their passions too fixed to be altered, and too violent to be resisted. On the contrary, those, who are sincere in the pursuit of virtue ; who

without our perceiving it ; and surely then *such* an influence may well be admitted *after* the proof of a divine Revelation, which declares the fact. But that the holiest of Beings should be the Author or Cause of moral depravity, is equally repugnant to Reason and Scripture. Yet this he must be, if he conveys it either by his own immediate act, or by the operation of those laws by which he governs the Universe.

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endeavour to discipline and subdue their passions, if they admit this Notion, and are ever so little inclined to dejection, or melancholy, when their best efforts prove ineffectual, as will sometimes happen, may be driven to a state of inconsolable desperation. Lord BACON says, men should not set themselves too hard tasks: and I venture to add, that if they have any grounds for supposing, that Nature has set them such, the performance is likely to be nothing; or very short of their real abilities, imperfect as they are.

BUT the sentence with which the Observations conclude, is of all the most curious. “ And most evidently, it is no more a hardship upon us *to become such as we are* by means of ADAM’s transgression, than to suffer what we often do for the transgression of our other Ancestors; or

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to have been created such as we are, without any one's transgression, which last, all, who disbelieve Original Sin, must affirm to be our case."

THIS sentence, in the out-set, promises great perspicuity, but is involved in such darkness both of sentiment and expression, that I know not at all what to make of it. God almighty, in virtue of his supreme dominion, might certainly create us with such excellences, or imperfections, as to him seemed proper. And although our condition, had ADAM continued innocent, and upright, might have been much more secure and happy, than it now is, yet, leaving Revelation quite out of the question, we certainly have no right to complain of its being less advantageous in consequence of his transgression; or because we inherit some part of
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his misfortunes, provided we are not loaded with his guilt; formally and finally punished for his fault; or liable to be so. If Original Sin means less than this, it means nothing at all. But this surely is something very different from a state of mere imperfection, whatever cause that state be referred to: and whether the former would, or would not, be a hardship, the common feelings of mankind will determine in a moment.

FROM the *Reasonings* of the Archbishop let us now pass on to his *Applications of Scripture*. The first Passage cited, is as follows: "The law of God is spiritual, but we are carnal; sold under Sin." From all that precedes and follows this Quotation, it is quite evident, that it is produced as confirming his arguments for the universal, unavoidable pollution of our
Nature

Nature through ADAM'S Sin. Now, the design of the Apostle may be clearly collected from the connexion which the Passage has with the context, as well as from the chief subject of the Chapter it belongs to. And it is the plain purport of both to point out the very different *spirit* and *genius* of the *Law*, and *Gospel*, in order to cure the Judaizing Converts, of their remaining attachment to those carnal Ordinances, under which they had hitherto lived, and from which they were now happily released. The best method of effecting this cure, was, to shew them the insufficiency, and imperfection of the *Law*, they so superstitiously revered ;—to shew them, that though wise in the grounds of its institution, as well as useful and necessary in its season, yet it always favoured their carnal, and corrupt disposition in two capital instances—by
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the burthensome number, and galling strictness of its commands and prohibitions, increasing *transgressions*; and, at the same time, lessening the merit of *obedience* by the meanness of the motives it proposed. On the contrary, the *Law of God*, now clearly revealed in the Gospel, is *spiritual*, and will free You, says St. PAUL, if You follow the spirit of it, from the dominion of that *animal* principle, by indulging which, your lapsed Nature, originally frail and imperfect, *becomes* corrupted and defiled: will release You from all subjection to those lusts and passions, by yielding to which, You are *sold*, as it were, and enslaved *under sin*.

THIS, I believe, is a fair and full interpretation of St. PAUL's words. And I would beg leave to remark, that, in the course of his reasoning, he plainly supposes

supposes good propensities belonging to our Nature, as well as bad : by obeying the former ZACHARIAS, ELIZABETH, and others are said to have been *righteous before God*, and to have *walked in all the Commandments of the Lord blameless*. Now, as no one would impute the conduct of these to Original righteousness, so the very different behaviour of the greater part of mankind may be easily accounted for without the supposition of Original Sin, which traduces our Nature, and dishonours the Deity.

SECOND Passage. “ Thus, by one Man Sin entered into the world, and death by sin ; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” ADAM being the first of the human race, if he sinned at all, must be the first, who sinned ; sin therefore, *entered* into the world by him,

him, and in consequence of it all his descendants (one or two excepted), became subject to that mortality, which he had incurred. Sin propagated from that root, or *beginning*, not from that *cause*, did afterwards become general; and every Sinner deserved death upon his own account, though, in some respects, not so criminal as ADAM was, nor at all the more so for having descended from him.

THIRD Passage. “The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his Youth. We were shapen in Iniquity, and in Sin did our Mother conceive us.” The latter member of the Sentence is put in the Plural, on purpose to apply the assertion more directly and clearly to the point of an original, and imputed guilt. Yet this, as might be proved from many parallel

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places * of Scripture, is a mere Hebraism, or hyperbolical Expression, denoting only a high degree of sinfulness. Had it been really inherent, strictly natural, and of course unavoidable, DAVID would not so often have deplored his own folly, but rather have complained of his hard fate; and have ascribed some part at least of the blame to *that* cause.

IN short, there is nothing in any of these Passages, when rightly interpreted, which can in the least favour the notion of a natural, or original corruption, derived from ADAM, and seated in the mind and will. Now, if neither these, nor any of the other Passages of Scripture, which have been alleged in support of this notion, do really support it; then

* Job v. 34. and xxxi. 18. Isa. xlviii. 8.

the ninth Article of our Church, was meant to be understood with a reasonable latitude, leaving every man in such difficult points, to chuse among the different senses of which the words are capable, that which he thinks most conformable to truth and Scripture. Of this we may be convinced from the beginning of the sixth, and from the whole of the twentieth Article. It is true the second concludes thus, “very God, and very Man, who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for *Original guilt*, but also for actual sins of men.” But the seventeenth concludes with the following general declaration, “Furthermore, we must receive God’s promises in such wise, as they be generally set forth to us in holy Scripture. And in our Doings, that will of God is to be followed,

lowed, which we have expressly declared to us in the word of God." Now, as the sense of the former Extract must not be such as directly contradicts all our ideas of God's justice and goodness, as declared in every part of his word; so the terms, *Original guilt* may very fairly mean *that guilt*, which the founders of our race contracted for themselves only, and which, although not transferable to their descendants, hath indeed involved them in many of its consequences. But as the Compilers expressly admit and assert, that Scripture is to be our ultimate guide in matters of faith, as well as practice; as the Article, which treats of Original Sin, founds all it asserts on what the Scripture declares concerning it, and borrows their very language to express its meaning, no doubt it must be subject to the same rules of interpretation with

Scripture

Scripture itself; in which particular precepts or doctrines are never to be construed in a sense not consistent with its plain and general tenour.

AND, on the other hand, if we appeal to the principles of a sound Philosophy, they too will confirm this liberty of interpreting in the present case, by assuring us, that the notion of *guilt* cannot, without absurdity, be applied to *natures*, the proper subjects of this quality being *persons* only. For when it is applied to nations, or communities, it must be in the way of *personification*; and the individuals, or parts, of which they are composed, are *actual sharers* in the guilt *imputed* to the whole. So little need is there to be disturbed at that Article*; to settle the precise

* The Reader, who wishes for further satisfaction on this Article, may compare Bishop TAYLOR's Exposition

precise sense, in which the Compilers themselves understood it; or to defend the Conduct of those, who assent to it, by Scholastic subtilties, or mean prevarication.

PERMIT me to add, before I dismiss this topic, that one of the best arguments to prove the moral government of God, is the moral Nature which he has given to Man, and a disposition, on the whole, favourable to virtue, not merely in individuals, but in the race, or species*.

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position of it, according to Scripture and Reason, Sect. 6. in the *Unum Necessarium*, with that by Bishop BURNET, who rather states the Opinions of others, than delivers his own. It must, however, be confessed, that he leans to the opinion of our Nature having contracted a real defilement from ADAM's Sin, which he endeavours, like SECKER, and others, to give an account of in a philosophical way, although he modestly gives it as uncertain and conjectural.

* Were we to take a fair estimate of our Nature, I believe that not one bad principle or passion would be found to be properly a part of it, which doth not
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If rather than give up a favourite system, or fanciful hypothesis, we abandon this strong post of Religion, the enemies of our faith will improve the opportunity *. How indeed such an hypothesis should ever have pretended any connexion with the Doctrine of Grace, or the Scheme of Redemption, it is hard to conceive. For the necessity of Grace to preserve us from the dangers of sin, and support us under the difficulties of duty, does by no means imply, that our Nature was originally corrupted, because that necessity may be proved just as well from those obvious

arise from the perversion of some good one. The very worst of all, even malice itself, is but the abuse of anger, or resentment.

* A late noble Author, whose peculiar distinction it is, to have defended by his Writings the Constitution which he laboured to ruin by his conduct, has availed himself of the Advantages which the Clergy have given him to assault Religion, by their deducing from the Scriptures such untenable Doctrines. His chief Attack is directed against the moral government of God, which, if we admit those Doctrines, lies open to insurmountable Objections.

defects of it, which we all feel and deplore. Not only frail, and helpless, but lapsed and degenerate, it is quite insufficient of itself, and utterly unable, to attain that excellence, which rational and intelligent creatures cannot but desire, and devoutly wish for. And as the unavoidable wants, as well as the *actual* sins of mankind will always find exercise enough for this benign influence of the Holy Spirit; so, to represent our Nature as more corrupt than it is, in order to magnify the merits of Grace, seems next to the folly of indulging in sin “that Grace may abound.” In the second place, the display of the divine goodness and mercy in the Scheme of Redemption is far more magnificent and glorious on the supposition, that the wretched state to which mankind are reduced, is the consequence of their own misconduct, than
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if the Evil, which demands so amazing a remedy, proceeded ultimately from God's decrees. But persons of a certain temper, and cast of mind, can see the Deity in no other light, than that of an Almighty Tyrant; and love to consider their frail fellow-creatures, as criminals from the cradle, at enmity* with their Maker, and heirs of perdition! Exit is animi tenor (says an Author, who never dreamt of Original Sin, or its Advocates) in rigorem quendam, torvitatemque naturæ, duram et inflexibilem; affectusque humanos adimit. Nothing here said is intended in the least to reflect upon the excellent Archbishop, than whom no one was ever farther removed from such a disposition. How then shall we account for such an instance of delusion in a per-

* See the learned Dr. WHITBY's long Note to the 3rd v. of the 2nd Chap. of St. PAUL's Ep. to the Ephesians.

son of his superlative sense and discernment?—An airy Meteor, resembling that fixed Star of ORTHODOXY, which presided at his birth, and ruled him through life, did perhaps deceive him; and, by its powerful influence on his fancy, swayed and directed the decisions of his judgment.

It would be to no purpose to produce instances of such faults in ordinary Writers, and it is now submitted to the discernment of the Reader, how far the following Extracts may be considered as proofs of the *loose* and *negligent* manner, in which the late Dr. OGDEN has *applied* the Scriptures, and *alluded* to them. And whatever may be the issue of this Examination, I should hope that his friends will be less offended, when they see that he is placed in such good Company.

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S E R M O N XXIII.

TENTH COMMANDMENT. PART II.

Coloff. iii. 2.

Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.

The two or three first Pages are intended to recommend humility, as the true basis of elevated affections (a thought, which the first sentence of the Sermon expresses by a very apt and striking comparison;) and to shew the mischiefs of discontent from its tendency to render us, 1st, *miserable*; 2ndly, *irreligious*; and 3dly, *unjust*. On the two former topics, the thoughts are very common, and not well expressed. On the last, his observations are in the following words:

He will not always withhold his hands, whose heart is entirely set on another's property.

property. There will be some unhappily favourable moment, when opportunity conspiring with inclination, the injustice long premeditated, will be at length accomplished ; and then, as the Prophet speaketh, “ They, who *conceive mischief*, bring forth iniquity.” Now, to *conceive mischief*, is a phrase of such very general import, that it has no more relation to Covetousness, than it has to ambition, rage, lust, jealousy, or any other irregular desire. The faults which ISAIAH rebukes in the Jews, in the Chapter from whence this passage is taken, are hypocrisy, violence, and a general disregard to truth and justice ; and indeed the more vehement and impetuous passions are apter to engage men in mischievous projects, than the cold, and creeping desire, which has money for its object.

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“ This is to be understood of the greater violations of justice, attended with danger ; for in less instances, and those that are safe, there will be no such circumspection, and delay. The unfairness of the heart within will be shewing itself incessantly ; and, like the stain of glass, through which a ray of the sun passes, will infect all objects, and give its colour to every transaction of life.” It may be the fault of my apprehension, but this comparison, or similitude, seems to me, like the glass itself, to be endued with the property of obscuring the objects to be discerned through it. For how can the unfairness of the heart give its colour to every *transaction of life*, unless it causes them to appear false, and unfair, like itself ? Yet, this I take to be quite wide of the meaning, which ought to be conveyed. For the real effect of it is, that
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it causes men to judge of just and unjust by the rule of interest, not that of reason and conscience.

THE Doctor goes on to shew, that the very *disposition*, though it should never betray itself, or be carried into act, is criminal, and will be punished by the great Searcher of hearts. From the evils of discontent before described, he proceeds to the consideration of its proper remedy—reflexion on a future judgment, and that contempt of all worldly advantages, or mean pursuits, which it ought to inspire. “ The great doctrines, the awful truths, the glorious promises, the tremendous threatenings of our holy religion, catch the heart, and carry it as a sacrifice, to heaven ; but, like the fire of the Lord, that fell on the Altar of ELIJAH, *consume the wood, and the stones, and*
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the dust." If the imagery of this similitude, or allusion, was represented by the pencil (the proper way to try the truth of it), we should behold the Doctrines, Truths, Promises, and Threatenings of our Religion, characterized by the colours, which their respective epithets and qualities demand; and in the form of so many flames, laying hold of the heart; carrying it, as a sacrifice, to heaven; and *consuming the wood, the stones, and the dust*; i. e. the terrestrial materials, contained within itself, considered as an Altar. I have no doubt but this passage, when spoken, was reputed a very fine one; and such it may probably still appear to many readers. Should that be the case, I am far from wishing to rob them of their enjoyment; but, from a reverence for Scripture, as well as a regard to literature, must pursue the dull, and

and invidious task, which is now before me. For the learned have *need* to be reminded, that, to render their Discourses instructive and useful in the utmost extent, they must not only conform to the indispensable laws of justness and propriety, but shew some degree of *taste*, in applying the Scriptures.

“ The example and death of our Lord Jesus Christ is to Christians an argument above all others, enforcing indeed every virtue, but with peculiar advantage this contempt of earthly greatness, and the love of God and man.

It is the thing least observable in his example, that he prayed for his murderers. *Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.* He left the bosom and bliss of his Father, and the glory which
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he had with him before the world was, *on purpose* to suffer thus: for this very *end*, that he might endure abuses and insults, stripes and death: a death ignominious, exquisitely painful and lingering." All this is conceived in the very spirit of METHODISM * (by which indeed the whole Sermon seems to be informed and animated)—as if he delighted in sufferings, *as such*, or chose them for their *own* sake. Could he be *capable* of those sufferings, which he voluntarily submitted to, as *means* to accomplish his great purpose, unless he divested himself of his glory for a time, and mixed with mortals? "He suffered this from the hands

* I am sorry to observe, that the *Influence*, which it is the chief purpose of these Pages to point out and to oppose, is not wholly confined to the *Writings* of the Clergy. For there are many among them, who, not contented with the real and solid praise arising from the faithful and zealous discharge of their Duty, as Pastors, in the ordinary course, seem ambitious to catch the Applause of the Vulgar, by their popular allurements, and devout singularities.

of *men*:" (At whose hands else *could* he suffer it, if he pursued his gracious purpose?) "for whose whole race it was, that he had abased himself so low, and endured so much. He came down from heaven, and would be made man, for the sake of men, who already owed their being to him; yet had broken his laws, were regardless of his Authority, insensible of his affection, and prepared to crucify him.

They indeed were enemies: but his love continued. *Whom he once loved, he loved to the end.* John xiii. 1. He created them to be good, and happy; and died for them when they were become wretched sinners."

Was it not the very reason of his dying, that they, as his fallen and sinful creatures,

creatures, stood in need of redemption; and that *without blood* there was *no remission*? The flatness and insipidity, the triteness and tautology of these pompous reflexions, are scarce to be paralleled in any Writer, even of the lowest rank,—I had almost said, *de fæce ROMULI*.

THEN follow three or four Pages more, as little connected with the subject, and in the same strain of vague declamation, supported by vague Quotations from Scripture. In short, whether we consider the reasoning, the method, or the style of this Discourse, I very much doubt (notwithstanding some shining Passages) whether any man of real learning and abilities ever produced, and presented to the Public, a meaner Composition.

AMONG the most usual ornaments, or rather among the tricks, of a false Eloquence, is *the studied and exaggerated Contrast*. I mention it here, because the fondness for this figure hath betrayed many of our Divines into false views, and wrong representations of human Nature.

A Passage or two in the beginning of Dr. OGDEN's first Sermon on the Sacrament will explain my meaning. After having shewn from the Scriptures the transcendent dignity of our blessed Saviour, in order to heighten it still more, he thus describes the condition of humanity.

“ On the other hand, *Man* was fallen from that degree of earthly comforts and enjoyments, in which this Divine Word had placed him, into a state of labor, sorrow, diseases, and death, by the sin
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of our first Parents; and was also liable to the sentence of eternal condemnation to be pronounced by the just judgment of Almighty God upon every *wilful transgressor*. He was in the possession of unutterable glory and felicity; we were overwhelmed in misery, and devoted to destruction."

THE great suddenness of the transition from one idea to another (viz. from *Original* to *Actual* sin) creates some confusion in the sentiment intended to be conveyed. It is plain, however, that by *man*, we are to understand the whole race of men,—ADAM, and all his Descendants of whatever age, although Children, before they are capable of moral acts, cannot be *wilful transgressors*. But why are we thus puzzled with inconsistent, and contradictory Accounts of our com-

mon Nature?—for the sake of the striking *Contrast*. “ *He* was in the possession of unutterable glory and felicity; we were overwhelmed in misery, and devoted to destruction.” Here we are hurried back with equal rapidity to the *former* idea: and what is this in reality, but the very quintessence of METHODISM—Original Sin, founded on Absolute decrees? One would wonder that Scholars should have recourse to such expedients for exciting devotion, because *they* cannot but perceive, that where the disparity between two Natures is infinite, all arguments against the worth of the inferior, deduced in the way of comparison, are nugatory and childish.

IT would be easy to pursue this Enquiry farther. But as it is needless to multiply instances, I shall only observe
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in general, that obscurity arises at times, in arguments too, which are obscure in themselves, from his Quoting Scripture, without announcing the intention for which he quotes it. The relation between the sentiment advanc'd, and the passage which is brought to confirm it, is not always visible of itself; and, in that case, if not pointed out, the consequence is, that, instead of giving clearness, each communicates to the other additional obscurity*.

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* I have already ventured (in a Note to my Remarks, &c. No. 2nd) to give my opinion on the *style* of his Sermons, and shall now observe on the *matter*, or *sentiment*, with the same freedom. Every one remembers the disappointment that was expressed at finding *so little* in them, curtailed and reduced as they were, to near one half of the original number. The truth is, the Doctor had determined at first to be *popular*; and for this purpose he knew he could not well be too *diffuse*. But being himself an excellent Scholar, and intending to print his Discourses, he was ambitious also to be approved by Scholars. This induced him to deviate from his first plan, and on a thorough revival, to contract and condense his thoughts, as he found opportunity. But the conse-

UPON the whole, I am strongly persuaded that a Treatise on Scripture-Quotations *, classed and character'd (if I may

quence was, that, leaning, at times, to opposite tastes, his Sermons have not that consistency of character which discerning Readers expected to find; and are less fitted, than they otherwise might have been, to please either the many, or the few.

As to those on the Sacrament, although they are not without merit, and though he left a written Memorandum, that they might be printed, I wish, for the sake of his reputation, that they had not appeared. For, after all that has been said in disparagement of his excellence as a Writer, it is still true, and may be said with equal consistency and truth, that the greater part of his Sermons have abundant merit; and it is with real pleasure I pay this tribute of respect to his Memory. A lover and encourager of learning, when living, he has left to the world a lasting monument of his learning and genius—a valuable Collection of religious Discourses, original in their *manner*, and unequalled in their *kind*.

* So early as the age of ST. JEROM it was a practice even with authorized Teachers to drag the Scriptures into the service of any System or Opinion, which interest or fancy might lead them to espouse. That FATHER, who excelled in interpreting the Scriptures himself, in his second Epistle to PAULINUS, written on purpose to recommend the Study of them, exposes, with a just severity, the licentious manner of Quoting and Applying them.—Nec scire dignantur (says he) quid Prophetæ, quid Apostoli senserint; sed *ad sensum suum incongrua aptant testimonia.*
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may risque the expreffion), according to their conformity with truth, propriety, and tafte, or their deviation from them, would be a curious, as well as useful performance. No one can doubt but that, when fparingly ufed, and judiciously employed, they give to Difcourfes great force and beauty. But the difficulty of employing them with propriety and effect, is much lefs attended to, than it ought to be, even by thofe, who cannot but know it. There are few Paflages of any length, which have not fome reference to the customs, opinions, and manners of the remote times in which they were written; as well as to the characters and circumftances of the perfons, to whom they were addreffed: and the fenfe of them often depends on the idiom of the origi-

Quafi grande fit, & non vitiofiffimum docendi genus, depravare fententias, & ad voluntatem fuam, Scripturam trahere repugnantem.

nal language, now understood only by scholars, and that not always, or not very clearly. Hence, what appears very strange to us, and perhaps is unintelligible, might be easy and natural, just and proper in the highest degree. But imagine some general resemblance between our situation, and that of the first Converts to Christianity, whether Jews, or Heathens; and in every other particular a total dissimilarity: imagine the difference, which must necessarily be occasioned by a translation, faithful indeed in the main, but almost literal, in order to render it such: imagine sentences of the sacred Books, pluckt from their natural order and connexion in the context; planted at random in Compositions, fashioned, of course, to *our* taste and manners; and presented to the hearer in scraps and fragments—(whether to give a cast

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of piety to the piece, to favour the indolence of the Writer, or to cover his defect of invention, it matters not much)—imagine all this, then tell me ingenuously, whether there is any degree of confusion, inconsistency, or absurdity, which may not be justly expected from such a proceeding? Yet such a *habit* of Quoting Scripture have many contracted, that they do as almost as mechanically, and with as little thought or attention, as any act, which is purely instinctive, or rendered habitual by frequent repetition: while others quote it for the purpose of supporting their respective systems, or fanciful opinions. In one case, Errors, pregnant with mischiefs of their own, and often connected with other Errors equally pernicious, are stamped with the seal of Truth: and in both cases, the Scriptures, alike misapplied, are despoiled
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of their own native majesty ; while they disfigure and deform the Discourses with which they are blended.

It is true, the *Prayers* of our liturgy, which abound with Scripture-Expressions, are both fine compositions, and true models of devotional taste. But the nature of Prayer differs much from that of Discourses ; and the Art of composing the former, as well as the *taste* by which it is governed, seems to have been gradually declining ever since the liturgy was framed. This indeed is the less surprising, when we consider the gradual change in the national manners, which several causes have conspired to produce, but none so effectually as a system of venality, destructive of all principle, yet proof against all attacks. Nor must we wonder, as the sense of excellence relates
alike

alike both to *taste* and *manners*, that there is a close connexion and sympathy between them ; but should keep a jealous eye on every abuse to which either is liable, whether from negligence and inattention, or from art and contrivance. It is by no means uncommon for extremes to beget each other ;—for religious enthusiasm to end in licentious manners ; and for these, in their turn, to produce the former. In the course of our eventful history we see this very order and reciprocation of causes and effects. May we not therefore justly esteem it an alarming symptom, if, in times like these, living Divines of acknowledged learning, and unquestioned worth, distinguished too by the importance of their station, have presented the world with bulky Volumes of religious instruction, from the general cast and style of which we are led to conclude,

clude, that piety cannot be maintained without the help of grimace, nor devotion be raised without inflaming the passions? Let us honour learning and worth wherever we find them. Let us promote piety by all prudent means. But instead of *extending* that influence, which METHODISM has acquired where it never had any right, or pretensions to admittance, let us resolve to confine it for the future within the limits of its own province, and proper jurisdiction—the District of Dullness and of Ignorance.





Förster Buchh.

An Essay on the character of methodism

Cambridge 1781

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